



Benjamin Franklin

Born Jan^y 17th 1700 Died April 17th 1790.

THE
LIFE

OF

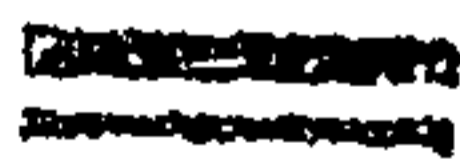
Dr. Benjamin Franklin;

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,

WITH

ESSAYS,

HUMOROUS, MORAL, AND LITERARY.



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PREFACE.

It is already known to many, that Dr. Franklin amused himself, towards the close of his life, with writing memoirs of his own history. These memoirs were brought down to the year 1757. Together with some other manuscripts, they were left behind him at his death, and were considered as constituting a part of his posthumous property. It is a little extraordinary, that, under these circumstances, interesting as they are, from the celebrity of the character of which they treat, and from the critical situation of the present times, they should so long have been withheld from the public. A translation of them appeared in France near two years ago, coming down to the year 1731. There can be no sufficient reason, that what has thus been submitted to the perusal of Europe, should not be made accessible to those to whom Dr. Franklin's language is native. The first part of the history of his life is translated from that publication.

The style of these memoirs is uncommonly pleasing. The story is told with the most

unreserved sincerity, and without any false colouring or ornament. We see, in every page, that the author examined his subject with the eye of a master, and related no incidents, the springs and origin of which he did not perfectly understand. It is this that gives such exquisite and uncommon perspicuity to the detail, and delight in the review. The translator has endeavoured, as he went along, to conceive the probable manner in which Dr. Franklin expressed his ideas in his English manuscript, and he hopes to be forgiven if this enquiry shall occasionally have subjected him to the charge of a style in any respect bald or low : to imitate the admirable simplicity of the author, is no easy task.

The Essays, which are now, for the first time, brought together from various resources, will be found to be more miscellaneous than any of Dr. Franklin's that have formerly been collected, and will therefore be more generally amusing. Dr. Franklin tells us, in his life, that he was an assiduous imitator of Addison ; and from some of these papers it will be admitted that he was not an unhappy one. The public will be amused with following a great philosopher in his relaxations, and observing in what respects

philosophy tends to elucidate and improve the most common subjects. The editor has purposely avoided such papers, as, by their scientific nature, were less adapted for general perusal. These he may probably hereafter publish in a volume by themselves.

He subjoins a letter from the late celebrated and amiable Dr. Price, to a gentleman in Philadelphia, upon the subject of Dr. Franklin's memoirs of his own life.

Huckney, June 19, 1790.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am hardly able to tell you how kindly I take the letters with which you favour me. Your last, containing an account of the death of our excellent friend Dr. Franklin, and the circumstances attending it, deserves my particular gratitude. The account which he has left of his life will show, in a striking example, how a man, by talents, industry, and integrity, may rise from obscurity to the first eminence and consequence in the world; but it brings his history no lower than the year 1757, and I understand that since he sent over the copy, which I have read, he has been able to make no additions to it. It is with a melancholy regret I think of his death; but to death we are all bound by the irreversible order of nature, and in look-

ing forward to it, there is comfort in being able to reflect—that we have not lived in vain, and that all the useful and virtuous shall meet in a better country beyond the grave.

“ Dr. Franklin, in the last letter I received from him, after mentioning his age and infirmities, observes, that it has been kindly ordered by the Author of nature, that, as we draw nearer the conclusion of life, we are furnished with more helps to wean us from it, among which one of the strongest is the loss of dear friends. I was delighted with the account you gave in your letter of the honour shewn to his memory at Philadelphia, and by congress; and yesterday I received a high additional pleasure, by being informed that the National Assembly of France had determined to go in mourning for him.—What a glorious scene is opened there! The annals of the world furnish no parallel to it. One of the honours of our departed friend is, that he has contributed much to it.

I am, with great respect,

Your obliged and very

humble servant,

RICHARD PRICE.”

The following epitaph on himself, was written by him many years previous to his death :

THE BODY
of
Benjamin Franklin. printer,
(Like the cover of an old book,
Its contents torn out
And stript of its lettering and gilding)
Lies here food for worms ;
Yet the work itself shall not be lost,
For it will (as he believed) appear once more,
In a new
And more beautiful edition,
Corrected and amended
by
The Author.



Extracts from the last Will and Testament of Dr. Franklin.

With regard to my books, those I had in France, and those I left in Philadelphia, being now assembled together here, and a catalogue made of them, it is my intention to dispose of the same as follows :

My history of the academy of sciences, in sixty or seventy volumes quarto, I give to the philosophical society of Philadelphia, of which I have the honour to be president. My collection in folio of *Les Arts & Les Metiers*, I give to the philosophical society, established in New-England, of which I am a member. My quarto edition of the same *Arts & Metiers*, I give to the library company of Philadelphia. Such and so many of my books as I shall mark, in the said catalogue, with the name of my grandson, Benjamin Franklin Bache, I do hereby give to him : and such and so many of my books as I shall mark, in the said catalogue, with the name of my grandson William Bache, I do hereby give to him : and such as shall be marked with

the name of Jonathan Williams, I hereby give to my cousin of that name. The residue and remainder of all my books, manuscripts, and papers, I do give to my grandson William Temple Franklin. My share in the library company of Philadelphia I give to my grandson Benjamin Franklin Bache, confiding that he will permit his brothers and sisters to share in the use of it.

I was born in Boston, New-England, and owe my first instructions in literature to the free grammar-schools established there. I therefore give one hundred pounds sterling to my executors, to be by them, the survivors or survivor of them, paid over to the managers or directors of the free schools in my native town of Boston, to be by them, or the person or persons who shall have the superintendance and management of the said schools, put out to interest, and so continued at interest for ever; which interest annually shall be laid out in silver medals, and given as honorary rewards annually by the directors of the said free schools, for the encouragement of scholarship in the said schools, belonging to the said town, in such manner as to the discretion of the selectmen of the said town shall seem meet.

Out of the salary that may remain due to me, as president of the state, I give the sum of two thousand pounds to my executors, to be by them, the survivors or survivor of them, paid over to such person or persons as the legislature of this state, by an act of assembly, shall appoint to receive the same, in trust, to be employed for making the Schuylkill navigable.

During the number of years I was in business as a stationer, printer, and postmaster, a great many small sums became due to me, for books, advertisements, postage of letters, and other matters which were not collected, when, in 1757, I was sent by the assembly to England as their agent—and by subsequent appointments, continued there till 1775—when, on my return, I was immediately engaged in the affairs of congress, and sent to France in 1776, where I remained nine years, not returning till 1785; and the

said debts not being demanded in such a length of time, are become in a manner obsolete, yet are nevertheless justly due.—These as they are stated in my great folio ledger, E. I bequeath to the contributors of the Pennsylvania hospital; hoping that these debtors, and the descendants of such as are deceased, who now, as I find, make some difficulty of satisfying such antiquated demands as just debts, may however be induced to pay or give them as charity to that excellent institution. I am sensible that much must inevitably be lost; but I hope something considerable may be recovered. It is possible too that some of the parties charged may have existing old unsettled accounts against me; in which case the managers of the said hospital will allow and deduct the amount, and pay the balance, if they find it against me.

I request my friends, Henry Hill, esq. John Jay, esq. Francis Hopkinson, esq. and Mr. Edward Duffield, of Bonfield, in Philadelphia county, to be the executors of this my last will and testament, and I hereby nominate and appoint them for that purpose.

I would have my body buried with as little expence or ceremony as may be.

Philadelphia, July 17, 1738.

CODICIL.

I, Benjamin Franklin, in the foregoing or annexed last will and testament, having further considered the same, do think proper to make and publish the following codicil, or addition thereto:

It having long been a fixed political opinion of mine, that in a democratical state there ought to be no offices of profit, for the reasons I had given in an article of my drawing in our constitution, it was my intention, when I accepted the office of president, to devote the appointed salary to some public use: Accordingly I had already, before I made my last will, in July last, given large sums of it to colleges, schools, building of churches, &c. and in that will I bequeathed two thousand pounds more to the state,

for the purpose of making the Schuylkill navigable; but understanding since, that such a sum will do but little towards accomplishing such a work, and that the project is not likely to be undertaken for many years to come—and having entertained another idea, which I hope may be found more extensively useful, I do hereby revoke and annul the bequest, and direct that the certificates I have for what remains due to me of that salary, be sold towards raising the sum of two thousand pounds sterling, to be disposed of as I am now about to order.

It has been an opinion, that he who receives an estate from his ancestors, is under some obligation to transmit the same to posterity. This obligation lies not on me, who never inherited a shilling from any ancestor or relation. I shall, however, if it is not diminished by some accident before my death, leave a considerable estate among my descendants and relations. The above observation is made merely as some apology to my family, for my making bequests that do not appear to have any immediate relation to their advantage.

I was born in Boston, New-England, and owe my first instructions in literature to the free grammar-schools established there. I have therefore considered those schools in my will.

But I am under obligations to the state of Massachusetts, for having, unasked, appointed me formerly their agent, with a handsome salary, which continued some years: and although I accidentally lost in their service, by transmitting governor Hutchinson's letters, much more than the amount of what they gave me, I do not think that ought in the least to diminish my gratitude. I have considered that, among artisans, good apprentices are most likely to make good citizens; and having myself been bred to a manual art, printing, in my native town, and afterwards assisted to set up my business in Philadelphia by kind loans of money from two friends there, which was the foundation of my fortune, and of all the utility in life that may be ascribed to me—I wish to be useful even after my death, if possible,

in forming and advancing other young men, that may be serviceable to their country in both these towns.

To this end I devote two thousand pounds sterling, which I give, one thousand thereof to the inhabitants of the town of Boston, in Massachusetts, and the other thousand to the inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia, in trust, to and for the uses, intents and purposes, herein after mentioned and declared.

The said sum of one thousand pounds sterling, if accepted by the inhabitants of the town of Boston, shall be managed under the direction of the selectmen, united with the ministers of the oldest episcopalian, congregational, and presbyterian churches, in that town, who are to let out the same upon interest at five per cent. per annum, to such young married artificers, under the age of twenty-five years, as have served an apprenticeship in the said town, and faithfully fulfilled the duties required in their indentures, so as to obtain a good moral character, from at least two respectable citizens, who are willing to become sureties in a bond, with the applicants, for the repayment of the money so lent, with interest, according to the terms herein after prescribed; all which bonds are to be taken for Spanish milled dollars, or the value thereof in current gold coin; and the managers shall keep a bound book, or books, wherein shall be entered the names of those who shall apply for, and receive the benefit of this institution, and of their sureties, together with the sums lent, the dates, and other necessary and proper records respecting the business and concerns of this institution: and as these loans are intended to assist young married artificers in setting up their business, they are to be proportioned by the discretion of the managers, so as not to exceed sixty pounds sterling to one person, nor to be less than fifteen pounds.

And if the number of appliers so entitled should be so large as that the sum will not suffice to afford to each as much as might otherwise not be improper, the proportion to each shall be diminished, so as to afford to every one some assistance. These aids may therefore be small at first,

but as the capital increases by the accumulated interest, they will be more ample. And in order to serve as many as possible in their turn, as well as to make the repayment of the principal borrowed more easy, each borrower shall be obliged to pay with the yearly interest one tenth part of the principal; which sums, principal and interest, so paid in, shall be again let out to fresh borrowers. And it is presumed, that there will be always found in Boston virtuous and benevolent citizens, willing to bestow a part of their time in doing good to the rising generation, by superintending and managing this institution gratis; it is hoped that no part of the money will at any time lie dead, or be diverted to other purposes, but be continually augmenting by the interest, in which case there may in time be more than the occasion in Boston shall require; and then some may be spared to the neighbouring or other towns in the said state of Massachusetts, which may desire to have it, such towns engaging to pay punctually the interest, and such proportions of the principal annually to the inhabitants of the town of Boston, if this plan is executed, and succeeds, as projected, without interruption, for one hundred years, the sum will be then one hundred and thirty one thousand pounds; of which I would have the managers of the donation to the town of Boston then lay out at their discretion, one hundred thousand pounds in public works, which may be judged of most general utility to the inhabitants: such as fortifications, bridges, aqueducts, public buildings, baths, pavements, or whatever may make living in the town more convenient to its people, and render it more agreeable to strangers resorting thither for health, or a temporary residence. The remaining thirty one thousand pounds I would have continued to be let out to interest, in the manner above directed, for one hundred years; as I hope that it will have been found that the institution has had a good effect on the conduct of youth, and been of service to many worthy characters and useful citizens. At the end of this second term, if no unfortunate accident has prevented the operation, the sum will

be four millions and sixty-one thousand pounds sterling ; of which I leave one million and sixty-one thousand pounds to the disposition and management of the inhabitants of the town of Boston, and the three millions to the disposition of the government of the state ; not presuming to carry my views any farther.

All the directions herein given respecting the disposition and management of the donation to the inhabitants of Boston, I would have observed respecting that to the inhabitants of Philadelphia ; only, as Philadelphia is incorporated. I request the corporation of that city to undertake the management, agreeable to the said directions ; and I do hereby vest them with full and ample powers for that purpose. And having considered that the covering its ground-plat with buildings and pavements, which carry off most rain, and prevent its soaking into the earth, and renewing and purifying the springs, whence the water of the wells must gradually grow worse, and in time be unfit for use, as I find has happened in all old cities ; I recommend, that at the end of the first hundred years, if not done before, the corporation of the city employ a part of the hundred thousand pounds in bringing by pipes the water of Wissahickon creek into the town, so as to supply the inhabitants, which I apprehend may be done without great difficulty, the level of that creek being much above that of the city, and may be made higher by a dam. I also recommend making the Schuylkill completely navigable. At the end of the second hundred years, I would have the disposition of the four millions and sixty-one thousand pounds divided between the inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia and the government of Pennsylvania in the same manner as herein directed with respect to that of the inhabitants of Boston and the government of Massachusetts. It is my desire that this institution should take place, and begin to operate within one year after my decease ; for which purpose due notice should be publicly given, previous to the expiration of that year, that those for whose benefit this establishment is intended may make

their respective applications ; and I hereby direct my executors, the survivors and survivor of them, within six months after my decease, to pay over the said sum of two thousand pounds sterling to such persons as shall be duly appointed by the selectmen of Boston, and the corporation of Philadelphia, to receive and take charge of their respective sums of one thousand pounds each for the purposes aforesaid. Considering the accidents to which all human affairs and projects are subject in such a length of time, I have perhaps too much flattered myself with a vain fancy, that these dispositions, if carried into execution, will be continued without interruption, and have the effects proposed ; I hope, however, that, if the inhabitants of the two cities should not think fit to undertake the execution, they will at least accept the offer of these donations, as a mark of my good will, token of my gratitude, and testimony of my desire to be useful to them even after my departure. I wish, indeed, that they may both undertake to endeavour the execution of my project, because I think, that, though unforeseen difficulties may arise, expedients will be found to remove them, and the scheme be found practicable. If one of them accepts the money with the conditions, and the other refuses, my wish then is, that both sums be given to the inhabitants of the city accepting ; the whole to be applied to the same purposes and under the same regulations directed for the separate parts ; and if both refuse, the money remains of course in the mass of my estate, and it is to be disposed of therewith, according to my will made the seventeenth day of July. 1788.

My fine crab-tree walking-stick, with a gold head curiously wrought in the form of the cap of Liberty, I give to my friend, and the friend of mankind, general Washington. If it were a sceptre, he has merited it, and would become it.

ESSAYS,

HUMOROUS, MORAL, AND LITERARY.

SELECTED FROM

THE WORKS OF

DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.